DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 359 585 CS 508 231

AUTHOR Trimble, Frank P.
TITLE Video as Character: The Use of Video Technology in Theatrical Productions.
PUB DATE Apr 93
NOTE 6p.; Paper presented at the Joint Meeting of the Southern States Communication Association and the Central States Communication Association (Lexington, KY, April 14-18, 1993).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Guides - Non-Classroom Use (055)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Audience Response; Creative Expression; Higher Education; *Production Techniques; Technological Advancement; *Theater Arts; *Video Equipment
IDENTIFIERS Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat; *Multimedia Technology; Technical Theater

ABSTRACT

The use of video images, tempered with good judgment and some restraint, can serve a stage play as opposed to stealing its thunder. An experienced director of university theater productions decided to try to incorporate video images into his production of "Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat." The production drew from the works of Josef Svoboda, a Czechoslovakian scenic designer who spliced large format visual images into his stage productions. A liquid crystal display rear-screen projector was employed in "Joseph," and a later production of "Godspell" used a video wall, a stack of 16 monitors that could be used independently or in various configurations. A list of issues that can guide efforts to include video in stage plays include: whether the video technology will complement or compete with the script; whether the images can be created given technology, time constraints, and budget; the impact of the video images on the actors; the effect on the orchestra's execution of the score in the case of a musical production; and whether the audience will view the production as glorified television or a night at the movie theater. Using video technology is also a way to fully involve more individuals (students) in a production, as the demands for support staff are generally high. (RS)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED359585

VIDEO AS CHARACTER:

THE USE OF VIDEO TECHNOLOGY IN THEATRICAL PRODUCTIONS

Prepared by

Frank P. Trimble
The University of North Carolina-Wilmington

Presented
at the
The Annual Convention
of
The Southern States Communication Association
and
The Central States Communication Association

Lexington, Kentucky
April 14-18, 1993

CS 508231

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Frank Trimble

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Several years ago I an opportunity to direct a production of *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat*. Having directed a fair number of community and university theatre productions, I felt I had at last found material suitable for an "experiment" I had been eager to try. Namely, integrating video and slide images into a production. Since that time I have used this technique in two additional shows. The purpose of this essay, then, is to communicate my feelings relative to the advantages and disadvantages of adding such a "character" to a stage play and to offer a checklist of sort in making decisions about the use of to avoid the abuse of such technology. (An article about my work on *Joseph*.... appears in the April 1991 issue of Theatre Crafts Magazine, now Theatre Crafts International, pages 74-76).

The first time I saw Woody Allen's film *The Purple Rose of Cairo*, I was fascinated by the concept of a cinematic image stepping off the screen and invading "reality." In addition, I've always found it amusing that so many movies made in the 1930's and 1940's were about people putting on plays. These occurrences, coupled with my somewhat eclectic performance training in oral interpretation and theatre led me to the exploration of searching for unique ways to create scenery and living images via video.

Fortunately, when starting on the *Joseph* project, I was working with a able and eager technical director. We have since teamed up to complete projects that have been more complex. After learning of my interest in video and slide applications, he recommended the works of Josef Svoboda, a famous Czechoslovakian scenic designer who had long since been splicing large format visual images into his stage productions. Svoboda not only

experiments with massive images but also uses unpredictable projection surfaces, including folded screens, architectural structures and actors. Reading Svoboda's work was both inspirational and depressing as he was operating with equipment I felt would be unavailable and certainly outside the means of a modest production budget. However, after some brainstorming sessions with my technical director we decided to set out to create a media-oriented production despite our restrictions. For the sake of focussing this discussion I will concentrate solely on integrating video images into stage plays rather than video and slide use.

As previously noted, one reason I waited until *Joseph....* to experiment with the use of multi-media was I had not, until that time, found material I thought suitable to the intrusion. At best, using video images will change the nature of the script (unless it is specifically written for the use of such technology). My reasoning here was that *Joseph....*, as an anachronistic retelling of the biblical story of Jacob and his sons was already bending the original tale, moving it through time and musical styles. In addition the inclusion of the word "Technicolor" was the invitation needed to rationalize my decision. Years later, I had similar feelings about *Godspell*, an updated recounting of the Gospel according to Matthew. In the foreword to the script the author, Stephen Schwartz, suggests that directors alter the text to suit the "times." My use of video here, I trust, stayed within the boundaries of his comments.

Today I hope to demonstrate a few examples of how I used video technology in both *Joseph....* and *Godspell*. In the former, a LCD rear-screen projector was employed. The latter show was supported by a video wall, that is a stack of 16 monitors that could be used independently or in various configurations. Whatever technology is employed, my work and the advice of others has led me to compose a list of questions to guide my efforts. They are:

1. Will the video technology complement or compete with the script and the preliminary plans for staging the play? In essence, is this particular script right for such treatments?

2. Are the images in my mind possible to create given the limitations of the technology, time constraints, budget restrictions, and editing facilities?

3. How will the images be integrated into the finished product in terms of logistics? (This includes the size of support staff [crew] required to operate equipment and execute cues.)

4. How can the space requirements and aesthetic characteristics of the video equipment be blended into the show's scenic elements?

5. What impact will the video images have on the actors' abilities to execute finished performances? Will special techniques be necessary to help them synchronize their activities with those of video figures?

6. What particular video images are most/least significant to my vision of the show?

7. In the case of a musical production, what impact will plans for video integration have on the orchestra's execution of the score and the music director's role in the presentation.

8. Ultimately, will the audience view the production as glorified television or a night at the movie theater?

The more I work with video (and slide) technology, the longer my list grows. I continue to gather information based on my own experiences as a director, interaction with cast members and audience members, and reactions to other productions I witness using such media-based support. One indirect advantage of the approach is that participants feel they are gaining experience in several performance formats simultaneously. For example, depending

on how elaborate the video images may be, cast members might actually make several short "films" within the course of creating a play. Also, it is a great way to fully involve more individuals (students) in a production, as the demands for support staff are generally high.

Ultimately, when utilizing video technology in theatre the axiom regarding "too much of a good thing.... " holds true. Yet, in my estimation, video images, tempered with good judgement and some restraint, can serve the stage play as opposed to stealing its thunder.

Macie, Tom and Frank P. Trimble. "Video Joe: Using Video to Create a Very Modern Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat," Theatre Crafts Magazine, April 1991, 74-76.